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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 003347

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: MODERATE MUSLIM SENATOR TO CONTEST  
ZAMFARA GOVERNORSHIP

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Ambassador Jeter met December 16 with Senator Lawal Shuaibu who represents Zamfara State and is ANPP Whip in the Senate. RNLEO was notetaker. Shuaibu is known to the Embassy for his past Chairmanship of the Senate Drugs and Financial Crimes Committee. He recently declared his formal candidacy for the Governorship of Zamfara on the ANPP ticket.

2.(C) The Ambassador applauded the efforts of Shuaibu and other members of the Senate instrumental in approving the three pieces of anti-money laundering legislation prior to the December 15 deadline imposed by the Financial Action Task Force. Shuaibu explained the last minute changes made by the Senate -- changes that weakened the Money Laundering Act Amendment considerably -- were the result of a few Senators who put their personal interests ahead of national interests and were afraid that the bill's requirements could somehow be used against them politically by the President. The Ambassador praised the Senate's commitment to meeting in emergency session to restore the amendment to its earlier, stronger version in time for the President to sign it and the other two bills into Law on December 14.

3.(C) After expressing condolences over the recent loss of Senator Idris Abubakar (Gombe State) who passed away December 11 in a London hospital, the Ambassador asked Shuaibu for a readout on his political plans. Shuaibu noted that he has begun an aggressive campaign to unseat Governor Sani, whom he views as "incompetent, corrupt and dangerous." Claiming that it is an "open secret" that Sani pockets much of the federal funds received by Zamfara State and earmarked for Local Government Areas (LGAs) for public works projects, Shuaibu characterized the Governor as "the biggest thief in Zamfara."

4.(C) Sani's professed allegiance to Sharia is a farce, noted Shuaibu, who claimed that Sani personally does not practice Sharia even in Zamfara. Sani is widely known to have girlfriends in Abuja whom he visits frequently and one in London who draws him abroad whenever possible. The imposition of Sharia rule in Zamfara, now three years old, has not improved the law and order situation in the state. Instead, the crime rate is increasing, with daytime robberies occurring brazenly.

5.(C) Shuaibu also expressed concern that Sani is courting indigenous and foreign Islamic extremists. Hezbah, a group of Islamic fundamentalists based in northern Nigeria, has been funded and encouraged by Sani, according to Shuaibu. (Note: The Hezbah form Sharia Compliance Squads in some states, including Zamfara, where they are given quasi-official status. According to some accounts, Hezbah activists instigated the November 22 riot in Abuja, emanating from the Friday afternoons prayers in Abuja's National Mosque. End Note) Sani also reportedly met recently with Saudi fundamentalist in the Saudi town of "Daman," which the Senator described as a "volatile area" of the Islamic Kingdom. Shuaibu opined that Nigeria's State Security Service should investigate Sani's foreign extremist ties. Allegations also continue to surface that Sani is accepting money from fundamestalist Arab sources, asserted Shuaibu.

6.(C) Shuaibu hoped that the Federal Government will disqualify Sani as a gubernatorial candidate, based on Sani's alleged corruption. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) and the State Security Service (SSS) are charged with providing to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) dossiers on electoral candidates who are not fit to hold office because of their corruption or criminal behavior. Shuaibu is lobbying the President's office to have these agencies submit a report

to INEC declaring Sani unfit to contest the Governorship a second time. Shuaibu also claimed that National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed, a native of Zamfara, backed his efforts to unseat Sani "100 percent," although Shuaibu and Mohammed are in different parties. Shuaibu appealed to the Ambassador to use his influence in supporting this effort, calling on the Embassy to push for Sani's disqualification with INEC. The Ambassador did not offer this support but pledge to keep an "ear to the ground," particularly within the Presidential camp, on developments surrounding the Zamfara gubernatorial race.

7.(C) Comment: Governor Sani is known for introducing "political" Sharia to northern Nigeria; during his tenure, Zamfara was the first state to expand the application of Sharia law to cover criminal matters. Sani's critics claim he is not a devout Muslim and has played the Sharia card to bolster his political standing. His politicization of religion has shown through other rash acts such as his late 2001 declaration of "jihad" against Muslims in the PDP whom he felt were trying to impeach him. Most recently, his Deputy Governor -- who many believe was acting on Sani's instructions -- declared a "fatwa" against a journalist of "This Day" -- the Nigerian daily newspaper that published the remark perceived as blasphemy against Islam. While Shuaibu's attacks on Sani are in part politically motivated, Shuaibu, in contrast to Sani, is a moderate with a good track record of chairing Senate Committees and working well with the Executive branch (despite being from a different party). He is well disposed to the U.S. and has broad support from influential political figures. His victory in the gubernatorial race in Zamfara could help moderate religious politics in Northern Nigeria.

JETER